

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 19, 2021

The Honorable David Scott
Chairman
House Agriculture Committee
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Yarmuth
Chairman
House Budget Committee
204-E Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman
Senate Budget Committee
621 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Scott,

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) and the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) are vital nutrition programs that help Americans afford fresh produce from their local farmers. These programs harness the symbiotic relationship between local farmers and America's senior citizens, and women and young children, to nurture healthy eating. While these programs are well utilized and highly regarded, they are woefully underfunded. As the House and Senate Agriculture and Budget Committees continue to work through reconciliation priorities and with the Biden Administration on the American Families Plan, we urge you to use those opportunities to increase the SFMNP and FMNP programs from their current authorized levels.

As you know, roughly 1 in 10 U.S. senior citizens (about 5,146,000)¹ are forced to live well below the Federal Poverty Level, the SFMNP is only able to reach about 725,000 due to inadequate funding.² Funding for the SFMNP has not been increased since 2008, yet illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes, diseases that can be prevented and even reversed by proper diet, continue to rise and be leading causes of death among America's seniors. The American Diabetes Association estimated a 41% increase in costs of diagnosed diabetes from 2007 (\$174 billion)-2012 (\$245 billion)³, most of these costs (62%) coming from Medicare and Medicaid.⁴ The backlog of requests for the SFMNP in the face of this health crisis is considerable and growing.

¹ The Administration for Community Living. 2020. *2019 Profile of Older Americans*.
<https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/Aging%20and%20Disability%20in%20America/2019ProfileOlderAmericans508.pdf>

² United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. 2020. *Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program 2020 Profile*. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SFMNP-FY-2020-Profile.pdf>

³ The American Diabetes Association. 2013. *Economic costs of diabetes in the U.S. in 2012*.
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23468086/>

⁴ The American Journal of Managed Care. 2017. *Economic Impact of and Treatment Options for Type 2 Diabetes*.
<https://www.ajmc.com/view/economic-impact-of-and-treatment-options-for-type-2-diabetes-article>

Last year, some of America's farmers' markets were unable to open their doors due to the pandemic. In the Washington, DC area alone, sales at farmers' markets in 2020 were down an average of 77% from 2019.⁵ Although the authorized maximum benefit an individual can receive through the SFMNP is \$50, the average seasonal benefit across participating states is only \$35. This means the program is shortchanging both our farmers and seniors due to underfunding. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, in order to at least meet the backlog of requests across participating states and lift every participant to the \$50 maximum benefit, funding for the SFMNP should be increased at least another \$20 million. For those reasons, we request using reconciliation legislation, which includes the American Families Plan, to increase the program by \$40-\$60 million to support access for those waiting on the backlog in participating states and allow states that are not currently utilizing the program an incentive to offer their seniors fully realized nutritional assistance. The increase should be provided in a way that will allow the agriculture committees during the 2023 Farm Bill to expand the program, increase benefits, and build the long-term baseline for the program.

We appreciate the recently passed House Agriculture Appropriations bill, which increased the WIC FMNP by \$9 million, and the efforts put forth by the Biden Administration through the American Rescue Plan to help increase awareness and access to the program. As nearly 1 in 7 children will be born into poverty in the US, this is a vital safeguard for low-income mothers and young children who are at nutritional risk.⁶ However, not only has this program's funding not increased in over a decade, since sequestration in 2008, funding has fallen by over \$6 million and never rebounded. We urge the use of reconciliation legislation and/or the American Families Plan to increase funding for the WIC FMNP by \$30-\$40 million. Again, not only does this help the beneficiaries, it also strengthens our local farmers who are able to supply their fresh produce to those most in need in their community.

Thank you for your attention to this letter regarding the funding deficits of the Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs. We look forward to working with you on these valuable programs, which bolster America's farmers and its citizens who deserve affordable nutritious food.

Sincerely,

CC:

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Charles Schumer, Majority Leader, U.S. Senate

⁵ The Cambridge University Press Public Health Emergency Collection. 2021. *COVID-19's Impact on Farmers Market Sales in the Washington, DC Area*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7900660/>

⁶ Children International. *Facts and Stats about Child Poverty in the United States*. <https://www.children.org/global-poverty/global-poverty-facts/facts-about-poverty-in-usa>



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